

709.15

B2

CERAMIC FORGERIES.

BY EDWIN ATLEE BARBER.

*Reprinted from the Journal of the Proceedings of the
Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia, 1907.*

CERAMIC FORGERIES.

BY EDWIN ATLEE BARBER, A. M., PH. D.

(*Read to the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia,
November 1st, 1906.*)

In treating the subject of reproductions, it is important to bear in mind the difference between *imitations* and *counterfeits*. An imitation is a more or less faithful reproduction of a genuine object, which is not intended to mislead. It may be issued for the purpose of showing skill in the resuscitation of a lost art, or to furnish a replica of some noted work of art where an original is not procurable, as the copy of an antique statue, or an electrotype of a noted piece of silver. A counterfeit, or forgery, on the other hand, is the more or less exact copy of a genuine piece, designed expressly to deceive. The rare soft paste porcelain of Capo-di-Monte was extensively imitated at the Meissen factory, but the crossed-swords mark of Meissen was always placed on these pieces to show that they were merely copies of the celebrated Italian ware. These apparently harmless Meissen copies, however, have been counterfeited by the ceramic forgers, even to the mark. The one is, therefore, an imitation, the other a forgery of an imitation.

But while simple imitations may not be intended to deceive, the collector should always be on his guard against them, lest he fall into the trap in which a prominent merchant of New York City was caught a few years ago. The firm of which this merchant was a member caused to be made hundreds of copies of the plates belonging to the famous Martha Washington dinner service, bearing around the border a chain of fifteen links, each one enclosing the name of one of the States. These were offered for sale at \$1.97 each, and were scattered broadcast throughout the country, as souvenirs. Some years later, one of these identical reproductions, handsomely mounted in a velvet frame, was offered at an auction sale of Washington relics in this city, and the merchant whose house had sold them, believing it to be, as described in the catalogue, a piece from the original service, bid it up to

\$250; and not until it was forwarded to him and he had carefully examined it did he discover its identity. A year ago there appeared in one of the Philadelphia daily papers an illustrated description of a wonderful find of a cup and saucer from the Martha Washington service, which the owner was willing to sell at the nominal price of \$150. On investigation, these pieces proved to be recent copies of the old ware, painted on modern French china.

I have here one of the New York reproductions, purchased at \$1.97, an exact counterpart of the one which sold in Philadelphia for \$250.

The inordinate greed of collectors of pottery and porcelain is accountable for the development in recent years of a flourishing industry in Europe, and particularly in Paris, where vast quantities of almost every known ware are counterfeited annually. Several enterprising manufacturers in Paris have retired with large fortunes after a few years of this nefarious traffic, and at least one house is still actively engaged in the counterfeiting of almost every noted continental fabric, and even of Chinese porcelains. A prominent citizen of Philadelphia, some years ago, brought back from Europe a full dinner service of what he supposed to be genuine soft paste Sèvres porcelain, of the period of Louis XV., which, had it been authentic, would have been worth at least \$100,000, and would have attracted the attention of the connoisseurs of the world as being the only service of the kind in existence. Only two or three weeks ago, there appeared in the printed catalogue of a prominent auction house in this city five items, of one dozen each, of Lowestoft plates, notwithstanding the fact that only one or two genuine pieces of Lowestoft porcelain exist in collections in this country. On inspection, these pieces proved to be French counterfeits of Chinese ware, execrably decorated, in supposed imitation of English Lowestoft. To such an extent has this illicit trade increased that a French newspaper recently stated, probably without exaggeration, that the sale of spurious Sèvres porcelain alone nets the counterfeiters 16,000,000 francs each year, and yields the retail dealers in Europe and America the enormous sum of 48,000,000 francs, or \$9,600,000. It is, therefore, not a matter for surprise that almost every American tourist who returns from abroad brings with him some of these worthless fabrications.

Within the past ten years, vast quantities of English china, bear-

ing printed designs of American scenery and historical buildings in dark blue, have been made in England for a Baltimore firm and sold extensively to American collectors at \$20 and upwards a piece, at a net cost to the importers of about 20 cents each. At nearly every public sale of old china in the large cities of this country, some of these plates and jugs find ready purchasers. A recent visit to a Philadelphia antique shop revealed the fact that almost every article on sale, whether china, glass, silver or furniture, was of recent manufacture, and yet the proprietor was making large profits from his daily sales. It is, therefore, not surprising that cautious collectors are becoming timid in adding to their treasures, since genuine pieces now offered for sale have become the exception rather than the rule. The time has come when collectors should pause in their search for acquisitions sufficiently long to fit themselves to distinguish the genuine from the spurious. The subject is such a comprehensive one that I shall be able to touch on only a few points this evening.

Every traveler to Greece and Italy is aware that classical antiquities have been reproduced there in great abundance for many years, but few have given the subject sufficient attention to enable them to distinguish the antique from the modern. Greco-Roman pottery, both genuine and counterfeit, is offered for sale in many places, and at first glance there is little to indicate the difference between them. There are, however, several infallible tests by which they can be distinguished. Suppose we take the so-called red-figured ware, extending from about 500 to 400 B. C. All genuine old pieces are coated with a black paint resembling varnish, which is so hard that it cannot be scraped off with a knife blade, and so thoroughly fixed that alcohol will not affect it. On the other hand, the black surface of recent imitations can be scraped away with a knife as white powder, and if rubbed with alcohol the black will adhere to the cloth. In the genuine, there will always be found a broad line of a second coating of black paint, outlining the reserved red figures, which is always lacking in the forgeries. Here, for instance, is a rhyton of excellent modeling, but when subjected to these tests, it is found to be a forgery throughout.

It is in the Sèvres porcelain, however, that we find the most dangerous, as well as the most numerous, forgeries. Both the soft and hard paste porcelains of Sèvres have been copied extensively for many years, and counterfeits are more frequently found

in the hands of dealers, and in many public and private collections, than genuine pieces. These spurious wares may be divided into two groups: First, those which were made at the Sèvres factory and sent out in an undecorated condition, to be afterward painted by unscrupulous dealers into whose hands they fell, and sold as Sèvres work; second, those which are spurious throughout, the body, decorations, and marks having been copied at other establishments.

The first variety may be known by the genuine marks of the Sèvres works, that used since 1848 being a small oval ellipse in yellowish green *beneath the glaze*, enclosing the letter "S" (Sèvres), and the last figures of the date as, "S. 74," standing for "Sèvres, 1874." This mark is obliterated by a deep scratch through the center, produced by a cutting wheel, showing that the piece left the factory in the white state. The dealer, however, if questioned regarding this scratched mark, will inform the purchaser that only extra choice pieces were so marked at the factory. Undecorated or slightly embellished services were furnished to the dignitaries of State, under Napoleon I., Louis Philippe, and Napoleon III., which, from time to time, found their way into the market and fell into the hands of the counterfeiters. Between the years 1880 and 1890, large quantities of refuse or imperfect porcelain were given to hospitals, and much of this was secured by speculators. To place on these genuine pieces elaborate decorations of cupids, garlands of flowers, gold monograms, and false marks was an easy matter, and uninitiated purchasers could always be found ready to pay large prices for them. In some cases, the paintings were of such excellence that they might readily deceive an expert, but an inspection of the marks will in most instances reveal the spurious character of the work. Among the imitations of Louis Philippe porcelain we find large quantities of plates, cups, saucers, and other pieces, decorated with a solid blue ground. This color, when it occurs on hard paste porcelain, is intended to imitate the beautiful turquoise blue ground color of the soft paste of the eighteenth century. The imitation is raw in color, opaque, filled with specks, and feels rough to the touch, and bears little resemblance to the genuine. Thousands of pieces so decorated are brought to this country every year by American tourists. In most of these pieces, made during the Napoleon III. period, will be found a date mark, rudely scratched in the paste, standing for the year and month when the article

was turned, as "73-12," meaning December, 1873. Frequently these pieces have been embellished with the monogram of Napoleon I. or Louis Philippe, and antedated with an overglaze decoration mark. A plate of this character was recently brought to me by a lady who had paid a large price for it in one of the principal shops in Paris. It was of hard paste porcelain, decorated on the face with paintings of cupids and garlands of flowers and gold monogram of Louis Philippe, with a solid blue border. On the back was the overglaze mark of the royal Chateau of Fontainebleau and a second mark indicating that it had been decorated at Sèvres in 1848. On the edge of the back of the plate, however, were scratched in the paste beneath the glaze the figures 76-10, showing that the piece was not made until October, 1876. Such pieces are the most numerous among the Sèvres forgeries.

The second variety of fraudulent Sèvres ware can best be detected by the marks and the decorations, since the paste is frequently a more or less close imitation of the original. The forged elliptical mark, to which reference has already been made, is of a different shade of green from the genuine, a brownish olive, which is somewhat larger in size, and is printed *over* the glaze, instead of *beneath* it. Many of the imitated marks have been wrongly applied, showing that the forgers did not acquaint themselves with the true significance of the original marks.

The question naturally arises, "Why does the French government permit this wholesale counterfeiting of the wares and even of the marks of the national manufactory?" I cannot better explain this peculiar condition of affairs than by quoting from a letter recently received from Monsieur Taxile Doat, of Sèvres. He writes:

"In France, as in the United States, every commercial product, in order to be guaranteed against forgers, must have its mark deposited in a special office. Here, it is at the Tribunal of Commerce.

"The monarchs who have reigned in France, with the exception of Louis XV. and Louis XVI., have never made deposit of the marks of Sèvres manufacture, which belonged to them personally. Only the Royal or Imperial authority arrested, by fear of prison, the boldness of forgers, who counterfeited Sèvres ware but very little during the lifetime of these monarchs; moreover there is no incentive to the forger to imitate anything but old pieces, which collectors want at any price. But after the lapse

of twenty-five or thirty years, pieces of the preceding reign become old, and there is profit in forging them. Now, since the mark was never deposited, neither the law nor the manufacturer can take action against the dishonest trafficker.

"In 1900, the impudence of the forgers was such that the government was provoked to register the present mark of Sèvres (the monogram 'R. F.' in a circle), which ought to have been done a hundred years ago.

"A Louis Philippe plate costs the counterfeiter from five to twenty francs, and he sells it for 80, 100, 150 or 300 francs, according to the decoration he places upon it. Whole services are fabricated in the style of Napoleon I., the Empire, of Louis Philippe, with all the marks under and over the glaze. A china dealer who would find it difficult to sell a fine genuine modern service at 100 or 150 francs, can readily dispose of a sham Empire service at 1,200 to 1,500 francs. I have seen sold to an English collector a fraudulent set of twelve tea cups for 1,400 francs. I know of five Parisian houses that have made their fortunes from the sale of these counterfeits.

Nor has Chinese porcelain escaped the successful attentions of the French counterfeiters. For the reason that hard paste French porcelain resembles superficially the paste of Oriental porcelains, it is comparatively easy for the French fabricator to simulate the Chinese ware. But in the spirit of the decoration we can readily detect, particularly by comparison, a vast difference. I happen to have here to-night a genuine Chinese plate of peculiar pattern. I also have a modern French copy of the same design. An examination of the paste will show that the Chinese ware has a bluish tint, while the counterfeit shows a creamy or yellowish tone. The great difference between the two will be seen in the details of the painting, which in the spurious piece is much cruder and more poorly drawn.

The famous factory of Capo-di-Monte, near Naples, Italy, has produced some of the most beautiful and characteristic porcelain, decorated with relief designs of marine and mythological subjects, artistically colored, the flesh tints of human figures being finely stippled in the style of miniature painting. Some idea of the rarity of this porcelain may be obtained when it is stated that there are perhaps not half a dozen authentic examples in public or private collections in this country. And yet there is scarcely an auction sale in this city, in which one or more so-called genuine

pieces are not catalogued. Particularly at this season of the year, one will meet with numerous examples in any of the large auction houses, which usually bear the Capo-di-Monte distinguishing mark, a letter "N" beneath a crown. It is perhaps needless to say that all of these, without exception, are gross forgeries. A genuine piece, if procurable at this late date, would command an almost fabulous price.

Palissy ware is extensively imitated and counterfeited at the present time, and pieces can be purchased for a few dollars; but the only fully authenticated example which has been offered for sale recently, so far as we know, was valued at \$40,000.

I might call your attention to the imitations of Wedgwood, of so-called Dresden, or Meissen (so extensively counterfeited), of Italian majolica, of Delft, of old French faience, always to be found in abundance in the antique shops, but I have already taken up enough of your time. In conclusion, let me sound a warning against the wiles of the average European or Oriental dealer. There are honest exceptions of course, but honesty and expert knowledge constitute a combination that is rare among them. And perhaps it would be well to keep an eye on our American dealer, for in him you may find greater sincerity, perhaps, but always combined with impenetrable ignorance.

EXAMPLES OF SÈVRES FORGERIES EXHIBITED.

Cup and saucer. Imitation of soft paste. Jeweled decoration on Sèvres blue ground. Forged throughout, body, decoration, and mark. It is not the soft paste of Sèvres. The mark indicates the year 1771, while jeweled decoration was not used until 1779, or 1780. Color, gilding, and painting are inferior.

Comport. Imitation of soft paste style, but on hard paste body. Rose Pompadour ground was never satisfactorily applied to hard paste, and the latest known piece of soft paste bearing this ground color is dated 1761. Sèvres hard paste was not made previous to 1769. Paste and decoration forged throughout.

Plate. Hard paste imitation of soft paste, decorated with turquoise blue, glaze mark on the back "S. 74," meaning "Sèvres 1874," the mark being scratched through, showing that it left the factory undecorated. The body mark scratched in the paste is 1873. Over the glaze is the 1847 mark of the Louis Philippe Chateau of Fontainebleau. The paste, therefore, is genuine, but

the decoration is forged, and the decoration mark is antedated 27 years.

Small plate of hard paste porcelain with mark "S. 60" (Sèvres 1860). This is the glaze mark, showing that it was glazed in that year, while in the paste is incised "59-11," meaning "November, 1859," when the piece was turned. The mark on the back (1868) and the gold monogram and decoration on the front are forged.

Plate. Hard paste porcelain. The paste, decoration, and marks, are all forged. The central decoration has been *printed in outline* and filled in with color, which was never done at Sèvres.

These few examples will convey an imperfect idea of the character of the forgeries of the Sèvres porcelain, but the ingenuity of the counterfeiters is so boundless that it would be impossible to do full justice to the subject in the space of an entire evening.

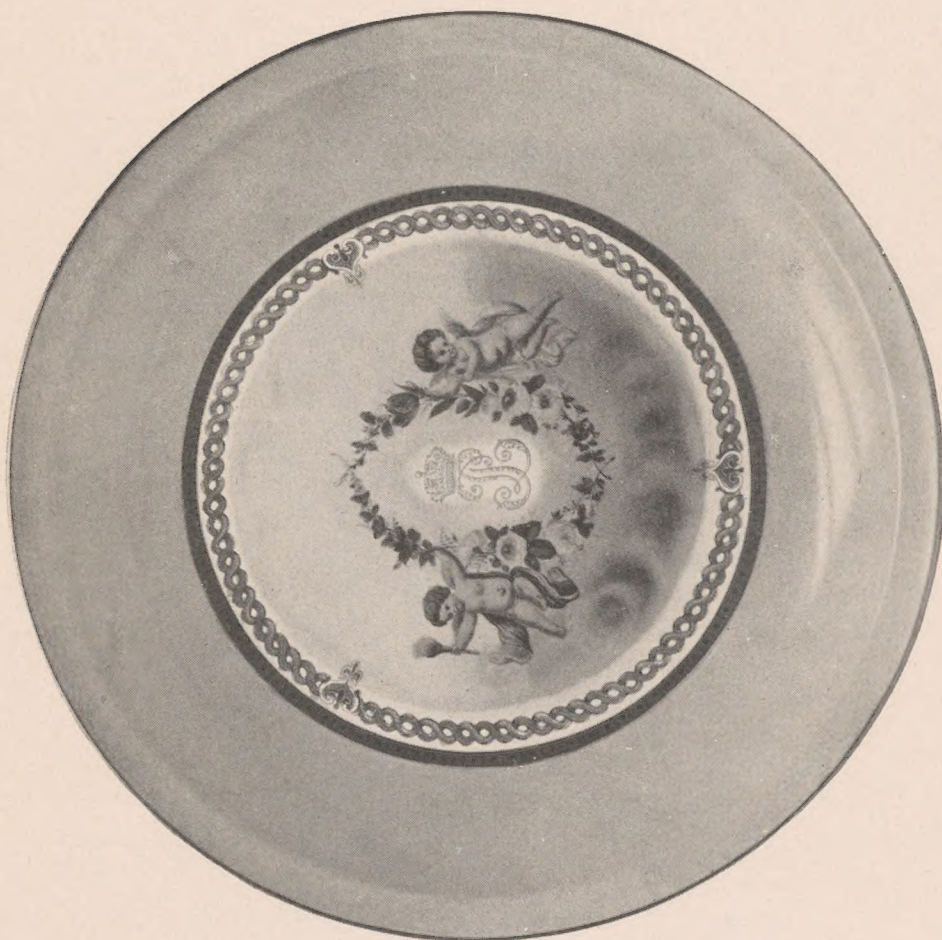


This plate is a genuine Chinese plate of the eighteenth century. The porcelain is of a pronounced bluish tinge, and the decorative details are carefully drawn.



This plate is a modern French reproduction. The paste is of a deep cream color, and the decorative details are carelessly drawn. The difference can best be seen by comparing the drawings of the lion and the vase and the four axe-shaped ornaments around the central design.

CHINESE PLATES, GENUINE AND COUNTERFEIT.



SÈVRES PLATE, FORGED DECORATION.

The body of this plate is genuine, but the decoration is the work of counterfeiters. Thousands of these plates with blue borders, cupids, wreaths of flowers in colors, and gold monogram of Louis Philippe, are sold to English and American tourists every year. These plates are all forgeries, as the scratched marks will usually show.



IMITATION OF SÈVRES PORCELAIN.

The paste, decoration, and marks are forged throughout. This is an example of modern French production, made extensively for sale to English and American tourists.

